

Tourism Industry Policy

Ministry of Trade and Industry
Government of the Faroe Islands

Tinganes
Tórshavn, Faroe Islands

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Forward | 3 |
| Background | 5 |
| Vision and Goals | 6 |
| Objectives and Aims | 7 |
| <i>The Role of Government</i> | 7 |
| <i>The Role of Advisor to and Developer of the Tourism Industry</i> | 7 |
| <i>The Role of the Faroe Islands Tourist Board as Co-ordinator</i> | 8 |
| Regulatory Framework | 9 |
| <i>A Business Regulatory Regime Consistent with International Standards</i> | 9 |
| <i>Good Transport Connections and Communications</i> | |
| <i>with the Broader World Community</i> | 9 |
| <i>Research and Development</i> | 10 |
| <i>A Well-developed Infrastructure Enhances Competitiveness</i> | 11 |
| <i>Tourist Attractions and Activities</i> | 12 |
| <i>Financial Support, Tax and Fee Structure</i> | 13 |
| Networking | 14 |
| Statistical Reports | 15 |

Forward

A quality tourist destination is an excellent country in which to live. Naturally, the transport and communications infrastructures at a quality tourist destination are excellent, the leisure activities are numerous and varied, the cultural life is rich and thriving, the history and traditions of the country are well preserved, and the natural environment is appreciated and well protected. It is a pleasure to be in such a safe and well-managed country with distinctive and exciting leisure time activities.

A tourist is defined as a person, who for leisure, work or some other reason, is away from his or her home longer than 24 hours and requires lodging. Under the general heading of tourism is included all those activities that are a natural part of a visit to the Faroe Islands by those¹ who reside outside the Faroe Islands and who come to the Faroe Islands as part of their work:

- visit relatives and friends;
- experience the Faroe Islands -- its land, culture and people;
- view, organise or participate in competitions for theatre, music and sports;
- participate in or make preparations for meetings, conferences, etc;
- stop in-transit to other destinations.

Tourists are important to the Faroe Islands because:

- they bring the international community to the Faroe Islands in one degree or another;
- they support the maintenance and development of better transport options;
- they are instrumental in generating work and business activities;
- they enable the Faroe Islands to become better known in the world as they share with others their experiences in the Faroe Islands;
- they create personal relationships to one degree or another with Faroese people;
- they help the Faroese to be more aware of the value of their own culture and land, of which the Faroese themselves at times are not as appreciative, and this, in turn, strengthens the culture.

Compared with other industries in the Faroe Islands, tourism is unique. The tourism industry is a service industry that earns foreign exchange. The vitality of the industry is directly conditioned on the fact that tourists come to the Faroe Islands and spend money. Tourism strengthens the underlying infrastructures of the community, such as the domestic and international transport network; accommodation choices; enjoyable leisure activities and experiences; restaurants and cafés, etc; physical and cultural development pursuits; and other pastimes. Indeed, the better and more varied the choices with regard to possible activities, the better the chances for a meaningful tourism industry. As an expanding tourism industry develops such possibilities, it strengthens at the same time the diverse bases for other industries – including the information technology industry.

¹ In this instance, Faroese who reside in the Faroe Islands, but who are away from their home for more than 24 hours and require lodging, are equally important as travellers and foreigners who come here.

A taskforce under the Ministry of Trade and Industry drafted the tourism industry policy.

The taskforce comprised:

- Atli Eiriksson, senior advisor in the Ministry of Trade and Industry and chairperson and secretary of the taskforce
- Petur Oliver í Hoyvík, chairperson of the board of the Faroe Islands Tourist Board
- Annika W. Joensen, previous executive director of the Faroe Islands Tourist Board
- Hjørdis Zachariassen, Domestic Department of the Faroe Islands Tourist Board
- Uni Danielsen, managing director of Flogfelag Føroya and chairperson of the Faroese Hotel and Restaurant Association
- Fríðun Hansen, department manager at Smyril Line

Subsequent to the departure of Annika W. Joensen to assume other employment, Heri Niclasen, executive director of the Faroe Islands Tourist Board, became a member of the taskforce.

The draft proposal was circulated for comment. Submitted remarks were incorporated into the revised tourism policy. A three-person group comprised of Heri Niclasen, executive director of the Faroe Islands Tourist Board; Kjartan Kristiansen, director of the Faroe Islands Trade Council; and Eva H. Bennicke, senior advisor in the Ministry of Trade and Industry, drafted the tourism policy.

Emphasis has been given to those areas that the Ministry of Trade and Industry administers; however, administrative areas that other ministries oversee have been discussed as appropriate.

The proposed Tourism Industry Policy was tabled for debate in the Faroese Parliament on 13 November 2001. The Tourism Industry Policy is the policy directive that guides the relevant daily work of the Faroese Government and the Faroe Islands Tourist Board. Care has been taken to ensure that the policy is comprehensive.

Bjarni Djurholm
Minister of Trade and Industry

Background

Transport, lodging and the purpose behind one's trip are central to tourism. Many varied interests are knit together at every destination. Travellers have their own specific reasons for travelling, eg, business trips; travel destinations are concerned with local income generation, employment, utilisation of infrastructure, protection of the environment, attractions and activities and marketing in order to compete against other travel destinations.

The development of the transport and information technology industries has facilitated the evolution of a world-embracing travel industry and the entire world is now one market wherein many lands promote themselves as travel destinations.

The industry is largely controlled by large, multinational travel companies, which provide a comprehensive overview of the various destinations (countries or specific regions or resorts). Emphasis is placed on cost and quality of the "goods and services" – including accommodation, transport options, cultural activities, available excursions, information technology infrastructure - all of which are indications that the local tourist industry is professionally managed.

Increasing competition demands marketing of tourist destinations. To be visible and competitive, it is absolutely critical for a travel destination to stay abreast of, utilise and creatively develop information technology capacity. In many countries, there is collaboration between the public sector and the travel industry to enhance marketing and product development and to insure that growth in the tourism industry takes into consideration the rest of the community, including the natural environment, and that it collaborates with the local leisure-time industry.

Efforts should not be focussed on just attracting foreign tourists, but also on encouraging local residents to travel within their own country.

Development and advancements in the tourism industry include 1) making existing tourism facilities better, 2) developing new tourist activities, 3) improving the level of existing tourist information and related services, or 4) improving quality control management, all of which shall ensure greater traveller satisfaction and enjoyment.

Modern day tourists are well travelled and are very conscious of the relative value of an experience or service that is offered to them. People often take several short trips during the year; thus, it is possible to spread the tourist season over a larger part of the year.

In short, one can say that the tourism industry in the Faroe Islands is a relatively small industry that appears to be growing and developing. Increasing demand for tourist services creates a better financial foundation for the industry and the underlying infrastructure within the country as a whole improves.

Vision and Goals

The overall industrial policy of the Faroe Islands envisions a self-supporting economy, built upon many different profitable sectors of commercial endeavour, which gives rise to progress and well-being within a framework of free international competition, and which endorses both vigorous development and the protection of the environment as the country's highest priorities.

The approved industrial policy emphasises four areas that have critical importance with regard to how industrial policy is formulated and evaluated so that it can be maintained on the correct course. These areas are:

- the role of government
- regulatory framework
- networking
- statistical information.

The tourism industry is not an independent industry as such. Rather it is a blending of all the various industries in the country and of each and every independent and concerned business. Transport, food and lodging and related services are, however, as previously mentioned, always the key businesses when one speaks of the tourism industry.

The purpose of the tourism policy is to identify the role of government in the management and development of the Faroe Islands as a tourist destination so that the tourism industry can become a more important part of the overall economy of the country.

The tourism industry should be a self-supporting, competitive industry that emphasises quality, a high level of service, and co-operation.

The tourism industry as it evolves should pay due regard to the natural environment, the Faroese culture and the Faroese community as a whole.

Objectives and Aims

In order to achieve and give resonance to the vision of the overall industrial policy, the tourism policy sets out and explores the main objectives and aims of the tourism industry under the four main policy areas referred to above that govern the work related to the implementation of the overall industrial policy.

The Role of Government

The role of government vis-à-vis the tourism industry, as stipulated in the overarching industrial policy, is to create a stable framework within which the industry can operate.

A stable framework encompasses the promulgation of a regulatory framework for the tourism industry. The tourism industry is a multi-faceted industry, which is regulated by a wide variety of laws. In addition to the regulations promulgated by the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the tourism industry is also regulated by directives emanating from other ministries, for example, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of the Environment, and the Ministry of Culture. The government as a whole needs to have the tourism industry in mind when laws are drafted that could have consequences for the industry.

Major changes are occurring in the international marketplace for certain sectors of the tourism industry. The government should be proactive in crafting the parameters within which the tourism industry shall respond to these changes so that the needs of the industry, citizens and tourists can be met at the same time.

The Faroe Islands Tourist Board (hereinafter “Tourist Board”) is the government agency that maintains connections with and collaborates with the tourism industry.

The main goals of the Tourist Board are:

- **to develop the Faroe Islands as a tourist destination**
- **to provide information about and market the Faroe Islands as a tourist destination.**

The Role of Advisor to and Developer of the Tourism Industry

The core elements of the Tourist Board’s domestic tourism development regime are 1) to demonstrate to the industry, the municipalities and the regional tourist associations a workable path toward development of the industry, 2) to provide advice about how to advance the development process, and 3) to strive to promulgate a good framework within which the industry can function.

The principal underpinnings of the travel industry are excellent and well co-ordinated services, quality and true value for money. To promote these elements, the Tourist Board should encourage and promote co-operation regarding 1) the co-ordination of development plans for the whole country and 2) quality and competency development (included herein is the development of a categorisation system for hotels and restaurants) among all those who work in or work in conjunction with the travel industry. Moreover, the Tourist Board should provide advice on and encourage

the development of and jointly market tourist activities and events. In this connection, the Tourist Board should encourage the tourism industry, government agencies, and travel associations to consider the needs of tourists with various disabilities so that they may gain access to said activities and events.

The Role of the Faroe Islands Tourist Board as Co-ordinator

Many varied interests are knit together within the tourism industry. Co-operation and collaboration is very necessary with regard to competition with other countries in the world.

The primary goal is to get tourists to the Faroe Islands. This goal is dependent upon effective marketing. Resources for marketing are limited. Also, co-operation regarding marketing is absolutely necessary. The Tourist Board shall facilitate greater co-operation among the businesses in the industry, including joint marketing.

In this connection, the Tourist Board should invite businesses to co-ordinate and co-operate regarding marketing. For example, the Tourist Board could assist in the creation of a marketing association that would operate under the leadership of the Tourist Board, be comprised of representatives from the industry and use available association funds for annual joint marketing. Through such collaborative efforts, a common promotional profile of the Faroe Islands as a tourist destination could be developed. This has long been known to be necessary.

In the same manner, the Tourist Board should co-operate with the regional tourist associations to market the various regional areas so that they can significantly augment the opportunities to promote themselves within the tourism industry and profit from and gain experience within the tourism industry.

The Tourist Board should emphasise the use of available information technology to market the Faroe Islands as a tourist destination. For example, the web page of the Tourist Board could be used as a portal to the Faroese travel industry and as a forum to announce new tourist activities, cultural events, and transport and lodging possibilities. Fostering collaboration with businesses and with the local tourist information offices on this particular aspect of promoting the Faroe Islands via a World Wide Web portal, which could also serve as a reservation system, is an element of the role of co-ordinator.

Regulatory Framework

A Business Regulatory Regime Consistent with International Standards

Visitors who come to the Faroe Islands should feel confident that they will be safe when they participate in the tourist industry activities that are offered to them. They should have confidence that standards exist regarding insurance and occupational health and safety and that these requirements meet international standards.

Tourists come to the Faroe Islands mostly to enjoy the natural environment. It is important to them that the environment is protected. The protection and preservation of the natural environment and of the animal life in the Faroes is important, not only with regard to the tourist industry, but also for the country as a whole.

The Ministry of Trade and Industry shall work to promulgate regulations that advance these specific concerns, but that are not overly burdensome to business. There is also the issue of “raised awareness”. By “raised awareness” is meant a greater awareness of the conditions that exist in the rest of the world. When one considers how to attract more visitors to the Faroe Islands, it is indeed the tourist destinations in the rest of the world against which we are competing. Because the tourism industry is so world-embracing, which in reality it is, businesses, government authorities and others, which possibly at first glance don’t directly serve tourists, should keep the tourist in mind.

Good Transport Connections and Communications with the Broader World Community

Transport and communications connections with the world are by ship, airplane, via cables and satellite. Communications are considered to be reliable, yet still evolving and this has important consequences for the community and businesses including the tourism industry. This is the reason that the government has exerted so much energy to fulfil its role of ensuring a framework and infrastructure for communication and transport linkages with the broader world, just as in other countries where such linkages are in place to facilitate such communication. Such close government involvement is not the way forward, however. On the contrary, the government seeks to liberalise the industry as much as possible. Thus, there exists a great challenge for the government to ensure movement toward freer, international competition for all communication linkages, and yet at the same time not placing all such linkages in danger.

Throughout the world air transport has been continuously more liberalised and price reductions are noted in certain areas. Free competition also exists in the EU and EFTA regions and in our part of the world only the Faroe Islands and Greenland are not a part of this initiative. In 2000, the airline companies began to institute lower prices at certain times of the year; this was first observed in a price war on the route between the Faroe Islands and Denmark.

The Ministry of Trade and Industry supports such initiatives so long as they meet as much as possible the needs of business, the Faroese people and tourists alike. Of course, such initiatives should also be advantageous to the greatest extent possible for the Faroese transport infrastructure as a whole.

Because the international airport is of such great importance for the tourism industry, given that around 80% of all travellers pass through the airport, the Ministry of Trade and Industry shall endeavour to work to improve conditions at the airport in order to increase capacity and reliability.

Transit by sea is another way to reach the Faroe Islands from abroad. The only company providing this transit service is Faroese. The government is desirous that transit by sea to the Faroe Islands shall continue, and that, as has been the case the last few years, no public funds are invested in this effort.

Research and Development

A well co-ordinated and responsive tourism and service industry requires 1) knowledge about how many visitors come to the Faroe Islands, 2) who they are, 3) why they chose the Faroes as a travel destination, 4) what expectations they have with regard to their travel to the Faroe Islands, and 5) if the Faroe Islands offers them what they desire. The statistics that have been compiled have not been preserved and organised in such a manner that they could be used for more extensive appraisal of the travel industry in the Faroes. There is a continuing need for more information about the tourism industry beyond the statistics compiled by the Tourist Board regarding travel and accommodation during its one-time study. Statistics are needed to quantify the economic importance of the tourism industry. Furthermore, statistics provide a basis for effective marketing, and facilitate the segmentation of visitors into identifiable target groups for specialised marketing focus.

The Faroese tourist industry shall now actually be studied quite comprehensively. Procedures have now been formulated that shall guide such studies in the future: procedures outline how each study shall be conducted such that it yields accurate indications about the state of the industry, and how large research projects shall be conducted. It is critical that results from the study conducted by the Research Department are not neglected so that marketing, development of events for visitors, etc. can be responsive to demand. Because the number of visitors to the Faroe Islands as a whole is small, special attention should be focused on analysing trends and behaviours of selected target groups. Given the range of travel destinations available to these target groups, one could effectively determine whether or not they would have an interest in the Faroe Islands.

It is understood that people and businesses need advice and support -- both new and existing businesses that have ideas regarding the development of the tourism industry. It is advisable to use the collective knowledge we have about this area for education and advisory purposes and the Tourist Board should develop its co-operation with such agencies and associations throughout the country and consult together when it is advantageous to do so.

The industrial policy for the development of the tourism industry in the Faroe Islands stipulates that it is necessary to augment the fundamental tourism education of all those that work in the industry. The Tourist Board should encourage the industry to educate their staff via tourist-related courses such as how to improve service, tour guiding, language training, administration and sales.

In collaboration with businesses in the tourism industry and the training centres in the Faroe Islands, the Tourist Board should implement a travel industry training program that focuses on concrete training needs and is organised as other training programs in the Faroe Islands with formalised courses and requirements. Moreover, knowledge gained from foreign training in the travel industry business should be systematised and preserved.

A Well-developed Infrastructure Enhances Competitiveness throughout the Land

Transport options have major significance for the growth of the tourism industry in regions other than the central part of the Faroe Islands. Travel between the islands, with the exception of Eysturoy and Streymoy, requires a ferry or helicopter. This means that visitors are required to adapt their travel plans to such realities when they travel from island to island. To make the transport options better has major significance for both residents of the islands and also the tourism industry.

The National Transport Authority (Strandfaraskip Landsins) with its nation-wide transport network is central to domestic travel and is a very important player within the tourism industry as a whole and for regional development as well. As a consequence, the regularity of the network and the information and services offered by the Transport Authority are of extreme importance. The intent of the government is to put elements of the domestic transport network out to tender as much as possible, although overall management of the transport network would remain with the National Transport Authority.

It should be noted that work is underway to expand the domestic transport infrastructure as the need exists and economics permit.

It is intended that the tourist industry in the various regions of the country will expand such that tourists will have more varied choices, the outer islands will develop and profits from a nation-wide tourist industry will flow to many. At the same time, increased regional tourism may remedy the existing capacity problems. Of course, as travel options improve, expansion is dependent on the possibilities for food and lodging. The development of regional tourism will be dependent upon the interest, labour and initiative of the people in the region. They often have the best ideas of what to offer tourists and how such arrangements can be accomplished.

In this connection, the regional tourist associations, which operate seven information offices, have an important role and the Tourist Board should support and encourage them as they provide information about, administer and develop local tourism. The regional associations can be the communications link for all the tourist-related events and activities in the region. They can make the tour operators aware of the regional events so that the activities can be marketed internationally.

At the same time, the Tourist Board should encourage the regional tourist associations, in co-operation with the municipalities and area businesses, to create their own blueprint for regional tourism industry development. These plans should

- explore in a detailed manner the circumstances regarding the local tourist industry
- define the main goals for the local tourism industry

- outline a strategy by which new, viable tourist attractions and existing activities could be developed or enhanced.

The domestic department of the Tourist Board should invite the regional tourism associations and the municipalities to co-operate in the promotion of the regional tourism plans and other concrete proposals.

The Tourist Board should encourage and support the offices of the regional tourist associations (ie, the tourist information offices) to function as service centres for businesses and cultural and leisure-time activities in the area. Further, they should be encouraged to engage in the promotion of stronger co-operation among the various businesses in the local tourism industry such that the industry works as a unit and establishes joint goals, and strives to improve tourism services, the dissemination of information, the depth of service quality throughout all the regions, and the development of tourist attractions.

Those municipalities that desire to participate in the tourist industry should deliberate on and in their council decisions address the needs of the tourism industry, such as lodging, camp sites, public toilets, signage, etc. for which the municipalities have responsibility. When, for example, public toilets are constructed, the municipalities should ensure that they are constructed in such a manner as to permit their use by individuals in wheelchairs. It is also a wise idea that when the municipalities arrange for certain leisure and/or cultural activities that an invitation be extended to the visitors in the area.

The Faroe Island Tourist Board should encourage regional tourist events that are arranged through close collaboration among the Tourist Board, the relevant municipality and the local tourist industry. For example, the Tourist Board could consider providing financial support of up to one third of the activity cost, based on the condition that the other parties bear the remaining joint costs.

The National Department of Public Works (Landsverkfrøðingurin) has the interests of the tourism industry in mind when it builds new roads. The department has constructed lay-bys (rest stops), placed signage, built public restroom facilities and caravan (RV) and tourist bus sanitation (dumping) stations, etc – investment that not only benefits the tourism industry, but national transport as a whole.

Tourist Attractions and Activities

Visitors who come to the Faroe Islands want to enjoy the natural environment and our culture, thus, the tourist industry as it developments shall observe due regard for the natural environment.

Well-known regions in the Faroe Islands are listed and described in the regional tourism plan from 1994 and we should be observant that such areas are not damaged. Oversight should be in place to ensure that the tourist industry itself does not damage the environment, because it is exactly the environment that visitors to the Faroe Islands come to experience.

Emphasis should be placed on ensuring that caravan (RV) parks and camping areas, and sanitation facilities are maintained and accessible to all. The stream of tourists

out into the natural environment can be somewhat managed by setting up signage and preserving the old paths through the outfields.

Such arrangements benefit visitors, land owners and the environment itself, thus the Tourist Board should consult on the matter with the appropriate authorities, land owners, individual farmers and associations that are engaged in protecting the environment, if there is a danger to the environment that extends over a number of years. Regional tourist associations should, in consultation with interested associations / clubs and others, prepare a list of and/or draft plans to develop, for instance, fishing options and new paths in especially beautiful and scenic areas.

Most tourists visit our cultural centres, eg, the Nordic House, the National Art Gallery, the National Historical Museum, etc. Thus, the Ministry of Culture should keep the tourist industry in mind when it develops or improves its cultural centres (eg, deciding upon opening and closing times). This is very important for both visitors and residents alike, especially during national holidays and vacation or holiday periods, eg, autumn and winter breaks.

If investment is to be made in costly tourist attractions, eg, golf courses and aquariums, such investment should, first and foremost, be done with the intent of increasing the leisure activity options for the local Faroese population and secondly for the benefit of tourists. The leisure industry and the tourist industry are essentially synonymous and should be viewed as one entity, as is the case in our neighbouring countries. When attractions and activities are developed, we should also keep in mind those with disabilities.

The Tourist Board should collaborate with owners, museums and others to determine whether specific attractions / areas within the Faroe Islands could be inscribed on the World Heritage List, which is administered by the World Heritage Centre, an international secretariat of UNESCO. Such an honour would showcase the Faroe Islands and make the country more visible within the tourism world. The advertising value of such an honour is inestimable.

Financial Support, Tax and Fee Structures

The aim is that the tourist industry will thrive by its own efforts with as little public support as possible. The support that is provided should be, for the most part, general in nature and for those events or activities that strengthen collaboration or create new opportunities.

The Ministry of Trade and Industry will work to permit tax-free shopping for tourists at Vágar International Airport.

Networking

Networking with other countries is of critical importance for the development of tourism in the Faroe Islands. Linkages with other countries are facilitated by many various media and information technologies. Development is quick and it is critical that the Faroese people from childhood have the opportunity to use and become familiar with how information technology develops so that the community as a whole becomes competent in information technology. Such efforts create the potential to enhance industry as a whole as well as the tourism industry. The Ministry of Trade and Industry, together with other public authorities, will work to provide better opportunities for, as well as access to, information technology.

Information technology, as noted above, is a very important media tool for the tourism industry, but one must not forget that face to face connections are also advisable when selling is involved. A large part of the effort of the tourist industry is to market the Faroe Islands. Thus, participation in trade fairs, exhibitions, etc is of great importance.

Of course, the Tourist Board should maintain close linkages with both Faroese and international businesses and facilitate co-operation between Faroese and foreign businesses. Attention should be focussed especially on those large-scale tour operators that have well-established and broad-based relationships with travel agencies, transport companies, sales agents, and other companies out in the world engaged in marketing and sales within the tourism industry that attempt to maintain up-to-date knowledge about tourist destinations. They each have their own network and thus it would be hoped that businesses would attempt to co-operate with as many organisations as possible, which would not only benefit the individual businesses, but also make the Faroe Islands more visible in the international arena.

The Tourist Board is a part of the co-operative initiative, Vestnorden Tourist Board, along with Greenland and Iceland, which arranges, among other activities, the West Nordic Travel Mart, wherein members of the travel industry have the opportunity to come together and in this way meet, co-operate and develop together with their counterparts in other countries.

The Faroe Islands and Iceland entered into a co-operative agreement to establish the association – FITUR – which offers a variety of possibilities for co-operation, development and networking between Faroese and Icelandic companies, as well as offering financial support for exchanges between the countries. A similar association – SAMIK – exists between Iceland and Greenland.

The Ministry of Trade and Industry participates in work focused on tourism issues under the Nordic Council of Ministers. It is of critical importance that the Faroese establish not just networks with Nordic countries, but also have an interest in and work with networks in other countries.

Statistical Reports

The Faroe Islands Tourist Board shall promote the development of the tourism industry in the Faroe Islands. In order to accomplish this, the Tourist Board must have documentation that reveals what the conditions are under which the industry is operating, how the industry is developing, and what changes are taking place in the overall tourism picture, etc.

The Tourist Board should strive to ensure that statistics regarding the tourism industry are compiled, recorded and disseminated to the tourist industry and to the public. Surveys should be conducted at regular intervals so that a true picture of the industry can be obtained, trends can be recognised and key data thus reviewed appropriately.

The Faroe Islands Tourist Board and Statistics Faroe Islands (the national statistical bureau) work together to assemble and preserve statistics about the travel industry. The industry itself shall provide information and thus it is very important that the industry sees the advantage in providing information and understands how necessary it is to collect statistics. The Tourist Board should demonstrate to the industry the importance of collecting information, how to compile statistics and present the results of such efforts. Close co-operation regarding this work is thus all-important to get a clear picture of the status of the tourism industry in the Faroe Islands.